

India Street Neighborhood Study
John Howland Swain House
21 India Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-1052

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
75M-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

INDIA STREET NEIGHBORHOOD STUDY
JOHN HOWLAND SWAIN HOUSEHABS
MASS
10-NANT
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Location: 21 India Street (on north side), Nantucket,
Massachusetts

Present Owner: Albert Lee and Abigail R. Hawes

Present Occupants: Hawes family.

Present Use: Seasonal occupancy.

Brief Statement
of Significance: A typical Nantucket house with off-center door
and chimney; part of the India Street Neighborhood
Study (MASS-1013).

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1800 -- John Howland Swain, block-maker, bought land
from George Lawrence and probably built his home
at that time.
- 1821 -- John Swain, merchant, bought from widow and
child of John Howland Swain.
- 1821 -- Ambrose Whiteus, ship-master, bought from John
Swain who was administrator of Estate of John
Howland Swain.
- 1823 -- John Swain bought back from Ambrose Whiteus.
- 1823 -- Captain Obed Alley bought from John Swain.
- 1835 -- Susan Alley, widow of Captain Alley, and her
children inherited the property.
- 1876 -- Sara M. Swain bought from heirs of Captain Alley
and Susan Alley.
- 1927 -- Sarah M. Swain died in 1927.
- 1928 -- Helen Glenn bought from Estate of Sarah M. Swain
for \$6500.
- 1958 -- John Robertson Ward inherited from Helen Glenn.
- 1964 to date -- Albert Lee and Abigail R. Hawes.
(Abstract: Records Registry Deeds, Nantucket, Mass.)

2. Date of erection: c. 1800

3. Architect: Unknown

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: The plans and con-
struction are typically 1800 Nantucket. H.B. Worth in
"Early Houses" states that "near the opening of the 19th

century a modification of the lean-to style came into general use on the Island and contained all the advantages of the ancient type and was more convenient. Among these are several on India Street. This style consists of a 2-story house with center or end chimney and a 2-story ell in the rear. From 1795 to 1820 most of the large houses were of this pattern."

5. Notes on alterations and additions: Well restored with little important change. Hand carved pineapples on the front step posts add an attractive air of hospitality to the house.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

This house is located in that area originally described as the Third Squadron of Wesco Acre Lots at a place commonly known by the name of Micah's Pond. India Street in the early 1800's was largely occupied by the wealthier families, many of whom derived much profit from the East India trade as well as from whaling. It was first called India Row, later renamed Pearl Street, and still later changed back to India Street, which name it now retains.

John Howland Swain, a block-maker with a prosperous business on one of the wharves, was 26 years of age and the husband of Prudence Simmons Swain, when he built this house. His business was connected with rigging whaleships. He died at the early age of 32.

The property is perhaps best known as the homestead of Captain Obed Alley who occupied it from 1823 until his death in 1835, when his widow and heirs continued to live there until 1876. Captain Alley was Master of the Whaleship Frances of New Bedford, a ship owned by William R. Rotch & Co. Between 1827 and 1835 he made three voyages on the Frances, but died of dysentery at Paita on the northern coast of Peru in 1835.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph of "Pearl Street" in Nantucket Illustrated, by A. Wittemann, New York: Albertype Co., 1888.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
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PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the India Street Neighborhood Study (MASS-1013) made in the summer of 1970 by the Historic American Buildings Survey on Nantucket, Massachusetts. This is the fifth summer project of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early

architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Project Director was Professor F. Blair Reeves, A.I.A., of the University of Florida. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Jack E. Boucher of Linwood, New Jersey. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.